EXECUTIVE POLICY COMMITTEE

QUESTION PERIOD

Minute No. 139
Councillor Gerbasi thanked His Worship Mayor Bowman for his very informative announcements at the start of the Council meeting and asked the Mayor to share some of his thoughts on the significance and the possibilities regarding the potential opening of Portage and Main to pedestrians.

His Worship advised that his vision for Portage and Main was to open it up to pedestrians and make it a walkable, accessible intersection like other big cities around the world. In his view, opening up the iconic intersection would bring more people downtown, help continue the revitalization of the downtown and make it much more engaging. His Worship added that Council would have to take into consideration subsequent studies and legitimate questions need to be raised and considered with regards to traffic flows and pedestrian safety. He stated he believed that this was not the busiest intersection for traffic in Winnipeg and that other busier intersections had pedestrians and had found a way to make it work. He concluded that he could not think of a better way to help send a signal to Winnipeggers that downtown was open for business and also open for pedestrians and stated that he welcomed the discussion.

Councillor Schreyer referenced the June 19, 2014 Report of the Governance Committee of Council, adopted by Council June 25, 2014, and asked the Mayor to advise on the status of Recommendation No. 6, "That the City Clerk consult with the Mayor's Office to determine the spending requirements of that office in order to develop a set of criteria, including a yearly audit of spending that would apply to the Mayor's Office spending, in keeping with the spirit of the Councillors' policy". His Worship agreed to report back with a status update.

In reference to Item 1 of the Report of the Executive Policy Committee dated January 26, 2015, Regarding an Amendment to Council Decision – "Approval of Funding Participation - Winnipeg Convention Centre Expansion Project", Councillor Mayes asked the Mayor if he had any comments about a more public process in terms of CentreVenture and how Council goes forward on those plans.

His Worship stated that the current Council had taken openness, transparency and accountability to heart and demonstrated leadership each and every day to bring greater accountability and checks and balances on behalf of all Winnipeggers. He advised that Item 1 of the Report of the Executive Policy Committee dated January 26, 2015, regarding An Amendment to Council Decision – Approval of Funding Participation - Winnipeg Convention Centre Expansion Project dealt with 220 Carlton Street. He noted that Council had inherited a very complex and difficult scenario and the real issue was the multiple contracts that were in place for 220 Carlton.

Executive Policy Committee – Question Period (continued):

Serious concerns were raised about the level of information that was disclosed to City Council from organizations, including CentreVenture. His Worship advised that the City would embark on a process to have a discussion with CentreVenture about their mandate as well as their governance and believed that Council did its best to make a responsible decision under the circumstances. He pledged that Council would do whatever it could to ensure that Winnipeg received the best development possible in a way that allowed the public to have confidence in the integrity of the processes and require that any money going from City Hall to CentreVenture relating to 220 Carlton go to public expressions of interest.

Councillor Browaty requested an update on the current status of budget deliberations, an update on how the public consultation process went last year, if that was feeding into this and future budget processes, and what type of opportunities would be available for the public to give feedback on the budget to be tabled in March.

His Worship advised that the budget cycle was tight and he would like to make significant improvements to the ability of Winnipeggers, as well as Members of Council, to have much greater input. He advised that due to the requirement to have approved budgets for 2015 by the end of March, the final phase of public engagement had been delayed and would be included in the 2016 budget. He further advised that Phases one and two were complete and that reports regarding these phases were on the City of Winnipeg website.

In reference to the boil water advisory, Councillor Allard questioned if there was information about the cause of the situation.

His Worship Mayor Bowman stated that they did not yet know the cause for the precautionary boil water advisory and would advise Winnipeggers as soon as the information was available. He added that it was up to the Province to lift the requirement for the precautionary boil water advisory.

Councillor Gillingham questioned if the Convention Centre expansion project should be required to report regularly to the Standing Policy Committee on Finance as other major capital projects were required to do.

His Worship advised that this particular project was being managed by the Convention Centre, not by the City. He also noted that the City does have a funding arrangement with Convention Centre though and that there was a requirement for monthly reporting to City Hall. He further advised that the Convention centre expansion was on time and on budget.

Executive Policy Committee – Question Period (continued):

Councillor Gillingham asked the Mayor to offer assurances that other projects would embrace and follow recommendations laid out by previous audits.

His Worship Mayor Bowman advised that the Executive Policy Committee recently met with the City Auditor and received status updates on implementation of the audit recommendations for the three main audits of concern. He added that there was much work to do quickly and, in due course, Council may discuss how audit recommendations flow through to other third parties. Typically it was done through contracts but there might be other mechanisms.

Councillor Eadie referred to the budget consultation and questioned the status of the suggestions made by the past Council. His Worship Mayor Bowman confirmed that they would be considered. His Worship added that his intent was to have the most innovative and progressive budget cycle in Canada to serve as a model for consultation and making smart decisions in the budget. Given the timelines there would not be a robust rollout of the initiative in this budget.

In reference to overseeing the framework for real estate, Councillor Eadie asked the Mayor if he was aware of his concerns in regards to Planning, Property and Development moving ahead with hiring a contractor for this task, when Council had requested that the Auditor undertake this. His Worship replied that he was not aware, but agreed to undertake additional conversation between the Councillor and himself on the matter.

Councillor Gerbasi questioned how non-Executive Policy Committee Councillors would be informed about the budget. His Worship advised that they had done a number of things in this budget cycle that had not been done in the past, including having the Chair of the Standing Policy Committee on Finance personally meet and have dialogue with each member of Council. He added that the Executive Policy Committee had been having consultations with various departments and stated there were difficult decisions; difficult work, and thanked them each for their input. He also noted that ongoing dialogue, primarily through the Finance Chair would continue and advised that a Council seminar was held on the budget. He further advised that they would look for additional ways for ongoing input as the budget was rolled out and welcomed suggestions on how they could do a better job.

Councillor Gerbasi questioned if the rest of Council would find out more about the decisions that impact them or would it be last minute. His Worship advised that they would look for ways to communicate before the day that the budget was tabled. His Worship advised that the capital and operating budget decisions would be sent to each department later this week. Departments could submit requests for changes, for capital and operating budgets in early February. Corporate Finance would compile the capital budget, operating and service-based budget for tabling in mid to late February and in early March the preliminary budget would be tabled. He concluded that they would look for ways and opportunities to communicate more quickly.

Executive Policy Committee – Question Period (continued):

Councillor Gillingham inquired when CentreVenture was obligated to undertake a public bid; immediately or after six months should they fail to achieve a development agreement on the site. His Worship encouraged Council members and the public to review the item that was adopted by Council. He added that the requirement for the 3.75 million to go to CentreVenture was conditional upon a number of things, including that they seek public expressions of interest immediately.